

Why is there an Exceptional Sex Ratio of Spousal Homicides in the United States? A Replication and Extension of Wilson and Daly

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Wilson and Daly (1992) examined spousal homicide samples from the United States, Canada, Australia, and Great Britain and concluded: "For every 100 U.S. men who kill their wives, about 75 women kill their husbands; this spousal 'sex ratio of killing' (SROK) is more than twice that in other Western nations" (p. 189). In this paper we examine the SROK for the United States using data obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) to determine if Wilson and Daly's conclusion can be supported. While confirming Wilson and Daly's summary findings, our results show that the SROK is an elastic measure, varying over time, race, and ethnicity. In many segments of the U.S. population, the SROK is comparable to the sex ratio of killing for other Western nations. Moreover, the differences between various racial groups in the United States are greater than the differences between the U.S. and Canada, Australia and Great Britain, respectively. We suggest that socioeconomic factors and family structure are the major reasons for the disparity in the SROK for different racial groups in the United States and abroad. The implications of our findings for future research are discussed.

Introduction

The Exceptional Sex Ratio of Homicides in the United States

In a previous analysis, Wilson and Daly (1992) used fifteen data files from a variety of sources to estimate the ratio of spousal homicide between men and women. This ratio, which they term the SROK (Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing) is defined as the number of spousal homicides perpetrated by women per 100 spousal homicides committed by men. According to Wilson and Daly, "A hitherto unremarked peculiarity of homicide in the United States is that the number of women who kill their husbands relative to the number of men who kill their wives (the spousal SROK) is exceptionally high" (p. 190). The results of their analysis indicate that the spousal SROK for the United States is almost double that of all other countries included in their study. Of all Western nations, the U.S. had the highest SROK, 75. This SROK is in stark contrast to New South Wales, Canada, England/Wales and Scotland, which had SROKs of 31, 31, 23, and 40 respectively (Wilson & Daly, 1992, p. 191).

Factors Contributing to the Spousal Homicide Rate in the U.S.

Wilson and Daly looked at several factors which may explain why "women perpetrate a substantially larger proportion of spousal homicides in the United States than elsewhere" (p. 190): gun usage, convergence of the sexes in their use of violence, registered versus de facto marriage, coresidency versus separation, ethnicity and age disparity. They found that the huge differences in the SROK for the United States and Canada, Australia, and Great Britain could not be attributed to gun usage or a convergence of women and men in the use of violence. Wilson and Daly found the remaining factors to be statistically significant predictors of the spousal sex ratio of killing, however the influences of these variables were not sufficient to account for the large disparity in the SROK for the U.S. and other Western nations.

One limitation of Wilson and Daly's study is that the spousal homicide ratio for the racial groups included are not representative of the United States. For the Chicago data set (tables 1 & 9, p. 191, 202) we calculated that approximately eighty (77.96%) percent of the spousal homicides in Chicago were Black homicides, and 5.70% were Latino homicides. Only 14.8 percent were White homicides. This is not the typical situation in the United States.

There also is a problem in Wilson and Daly's analysis with the time dimension. Wilson and Daly used data sets from the sixties (Chicago, 1965-1989) and seventies (Detroit, 1972) for the same study. In addition, to derive the sex ratio of killing for Denmark, Wilson and Daly relied upon the results of a 1965 study by iciliano. This study utilized homicide data for the years 1933-1961. As we will demonstrate, the SROK varies over time so comparisons made across different time periods can lead

to inaccurate conclusions.

Despite the limitations of Wilson and Daly's analysis, it does provide important information regarding the spousal sex ratio of killing in the United States and abroad. Their study offers plausible explanations for the magnitude of the SROK in the United States. In order to better understand the occurrence of this phenomenon in the U.S., we reanalyzed the SROK using the Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR).

The SROK Revisited

For our reexamination of the sex ratio of spousal killing in the United States we use the SHR for the years 1976-1989. Wilson and Daly presented some partial findings derived from the SHR which Maxfield (1989) analyzed as a by product of research on another subject. However, Wilson and Daly chose not to use the SHR because they contend that these data are unreliable and incomplete. It will be appropriate, therefore, to describe the SHR before explaining why Wilson and Daly's claims about its validity are not relevant for our analysis.

Data Set - Supplementary Homicide Reports

The Supplementary Homicide Reports system is part of the general Uniform Crime Report System (Akiyama & Rosenthal, 1990; Schneider & Wiersema, 1990). Law enforcement agencies that report criminal homicides on the basic Uniform Crime Report (UCR) forms are requested (but not required) to submit a Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) for each month (Uniform Crime Report Hand Book, 1984, p. 63). The SHRs are not submitted by agencies for months in which no homicides were reported to the police.

The SHR is incident oriented, i.e. if more than one murder occurred during the same incident only one form will be filled out for all homicides. Each record of a single event includes demographic characteristics of the victim(s) and offender(s) (if known) such as age, race, gender, as well as weapon used, circumstances surrounding the homicide, and the relationship of the victim(s) to the offender(s). The SHR system has been revised more than once since its inception. Prior to 1976 data was collected for victims only, however since 1976 data for offenders also is compiled (Riedel, 1990, p. 178).

Some aspects of the SHR data have been criticized by researchers on the grounds of its unreliability. One of the major criticisms pertains to the "circumstances" variable which includes many factors that can be used to categorize the nature of an incident. Labels such as "love triangle", "killed by baby sitter", "brawl under influence of alcohol", "argument over money", "killed while being robbed", "killed while being raped", are all used to classify a homicide. The principal problem with the circumstances variable is that similar incidents may be interpreted differently by each law enforcement agency (Blackman & Gardener,

1986; Loftin, 1986). Another major problem with the circumstances variable is that the classification categories may not be mutually exclusive. As a result of these problems, the validity of the SHR may be jeopardized.

Maxfield (1989) provides a summary of various studies which assess the efficacy of the Supplementary Homicide Report. These studies document some flaws in the data, especially inappropriate completion of forms by law enforcement agencies and the misclassification of cases. (See Loftin, 1986; Loftin, Kindley, Norris, & Wiersema, 1987; Wiersema, 1987; Williams & Flewelling, 1987, 1988; Zahn & Sagi, 1987).

Assessments of the SHR's accuracy at the aggregate level are more encouraging, however. In three studies, researchers examined the agreement between the SHR and city police information with respect to number of homicides reported and completeness of information submitted to the FBI (Riedel, 1987; Riedel & Zahn, 1985; Zahn & Riedel, 1983). Riedel (1990, p. 181) calculated the congruity between police records in seven large cities and the SHR for the year 1978. The ratio between the total number of murder cases as reported by police departments and the SHR was between 0.97 to 1.07. In addition, if the records for all large cities were combined (a calculation not conducted by Riedel), we find that the SHR reported 1202 cases while the city police records reported 1208. The total ratio is therefore 99.5% (1202/1208), which makes the SHR an accurate measure of total homicides known to police in large cities. Riedel (1990) concluded that in general the agreement between police departments and the SHR is high.

Riedel (1990, p. 183) also compared the classification of victim/offender relationships as reported by police departments and the Supplementary Homicide Report. Again, if the data for all seven cities are combined, we obtain an agreement ratio of approximately 92% for the general definition of "within family" murders. ("Within family" murders includes husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, in-law, stepfather, stepmother, stepson, stepdaughter, and a broad definition of "other family"). It is plausible that a narrow definition of spouses, such as legally married (not separated), will enhance the accuracy of relationship classification.

Wilson and Daly (p. 190) criticize the SHR for incompleteness since police departments do not update the cases at the end of each month. According to the reporting systems, each month police departments send information to the UCR if a homicide has occurred. Some law enforcement agencies send the SHR forms the same month in which the homicide takes place, therefore the SHR may not contain all the information pertaining to the incident. While we agree with Wilson and Daly that this is problematic, most spousal homicides, however, are solved shortly after the incident occurs so this issue usually is not relevant. Notwithstanding, the incompleteness of some SHR reports is not necessarily problematic for our analysis since our study focuses on ratios and not frequencies. A few missing or over represented cases will not seriously alter the magnitude of the SROK.

The SHR data was dismissed by Wilson and Daly as an unreliable source, however they do not provide any evidence to substantiate the reliability of the data sets they used for their study. Wilson and Daly do not adequately discuss why their statistics are superior to those provided by the SHR. Moreover, it would have been beneficial for Wilson and Daly to analyze the SHR data in order to compare its congruity with the data sets they examined. Their inclusion of Maxfield's (1989) partial study cannot serve as a substitute for a more comprehensive investigation. If Wilson and Daly had conducted this comparative analysis, they would have realized that their findings generally are confirmed by the SHR data.

Data

Our analysis consists of all cases of spouse homicide (husband, wife, common-law husband, and common-law wife, ex-husband, ex-wife) as they appear in the Supplemental Homicide Reports for the years 1976- 1989, a total of 22,442 cases. In order to compare our study with Wilson and Daly's, we have only included cases where the race of the victim and offender are known, and where both parties are of the same race. In some cases (where mentioned) homicides between boyfriend and girlfriends are included. Homicides with multiple victims and offenders were excluded from our analysis. Limiting these analyses to single victim and offender homicides is warranted because prior analyses of homicide (e.g. Block, 1985) indicate that the age, sex, race and ethnic composition, as well as the situational circumstances of incidents involving multiple offenders, victims, or both, tend to differ from single victim/offender incidents.

Results

Table 1 shows the SROK by race and ethnicity. The findings demonstrate that there are significant differences between the races. Asians have the lowest SROK of 18, while Blacks have the highest, 118. In the middle are Whites who have a SROK of 49 and the sex ratio of spousal killing for Native Americans is 58. The ethnicity variable in the SHR was created to measure the Hispanic origin of victim/offender and is separated from race. Because of classifications problems there are some missing cases.[1] However, there are still 844 cases which were split between Black and White Hispanics. In both cases, the SROK is relatively low (33 for White Hispanic and 40 for Black Hispanic), but the small number of cases for Black Hispanic do not allow us to draw unequivocal conclusions about t.

Table 1
The Sex Ratio of Killing (SROK^a) by Race and Ethnicity

	Killer		SROK
	Male	Female	
White	8709	4245	48.74
Black	4225	4989	118.08
Asian	145	26	17.93
Indian	<u>65</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>58.46</u>
Total	13144	9298	70.73
Total (Including interracial marriages and unknown)	13681 (537)	9582 (284)	70.00

SROK by Ethnicity

Hispanic (White)	609	204	33.49
Hispanic (Black)	<u>22</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>40.90</u>
Total	631	213	33.75

^a The SROK is calculated by dividing the number of female homicides by male homicides and then multiplying by 100.

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In Table 2 we present the sex ratio of killing for each racial group and the overall total by relationship. The picture seems clear for all racial categories. The highest SROK is found in common-law marriage for any race. The SROK for Whites is 54 and for Blacks 144. The figures for Asians and Native American Indians are not large enough to warrant drawing substantive conclusions. It is interesting to note, however, that in the case of Native Americans, the SROK is 100 for common law and ex-spouse relationships, 40 for boyfriend/girlfriend, and 33 for legally married couples. For Blacks, the SROK is lower in ex-spouse and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships than in the case of legal marriage, and for Whites the SROK is lower in boyfriend/girlfriend relationships than in the case of legal marriage.[2] These findings are similar to Wilson and Daly's results (table 7, pg. 200).

Table 2
The Sex Ratio of Killing (SROK^a) by Race and Type of Relationship

	Male	Killer Female	SROK
White			
Legal marriage	7523	3645	48
Common-law	543	293	54
Ex-spouse	643	307	48
Boy/girlfriend	2325	827	36
Black			
Legal marriage	3046	3379	111
Common-law	992	1425	144
Ex-spouse	187	185	99
Boy/girl-friend	2548	2499	98
Asian			
Legal marriage	127	22	17
Common-law	8	2	25
Ex-spouse	10	2	20
Boy/girl-friend	53	11	21
Indian			
Legal marriage	58	19	33
Common-law	5	5	100
Ex-spouse	2	2	100
Boy/girl-friend	47	19	40
Total (including unknown and interracial marriages)			
Legal marriage	11145	7269	65
Common-law	1796	1654	92
Ex-spouse	882	517	59
Boy/girl-friend	5355	3256	60
SROK by Ethnicity			
Hispanic			
Legal marriage	473	158	33
Common-law	120	49	40
Ex-spouse	47	9	19
Boy/girl-friend	235	64	27

^a The SROK is calculated by dividing the number of female homicides by male homicides and then multiplying by 100.

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Table 3 shows the changes in the spousal homicide rate over time. Because of the small sample size of Asians and Native Americans, we divided our sample into two groups, Blacks, and Non Blacks. The differences between the two groups over the fourteen year time period is remarkable. The SROK for the Black group reached a maximum of 137 in 1977 and a minimum of 85 in 1988. The SROK for Non Blacks was highest in 1979 (SROK=63) and lowest in 1988 (SROK=32).

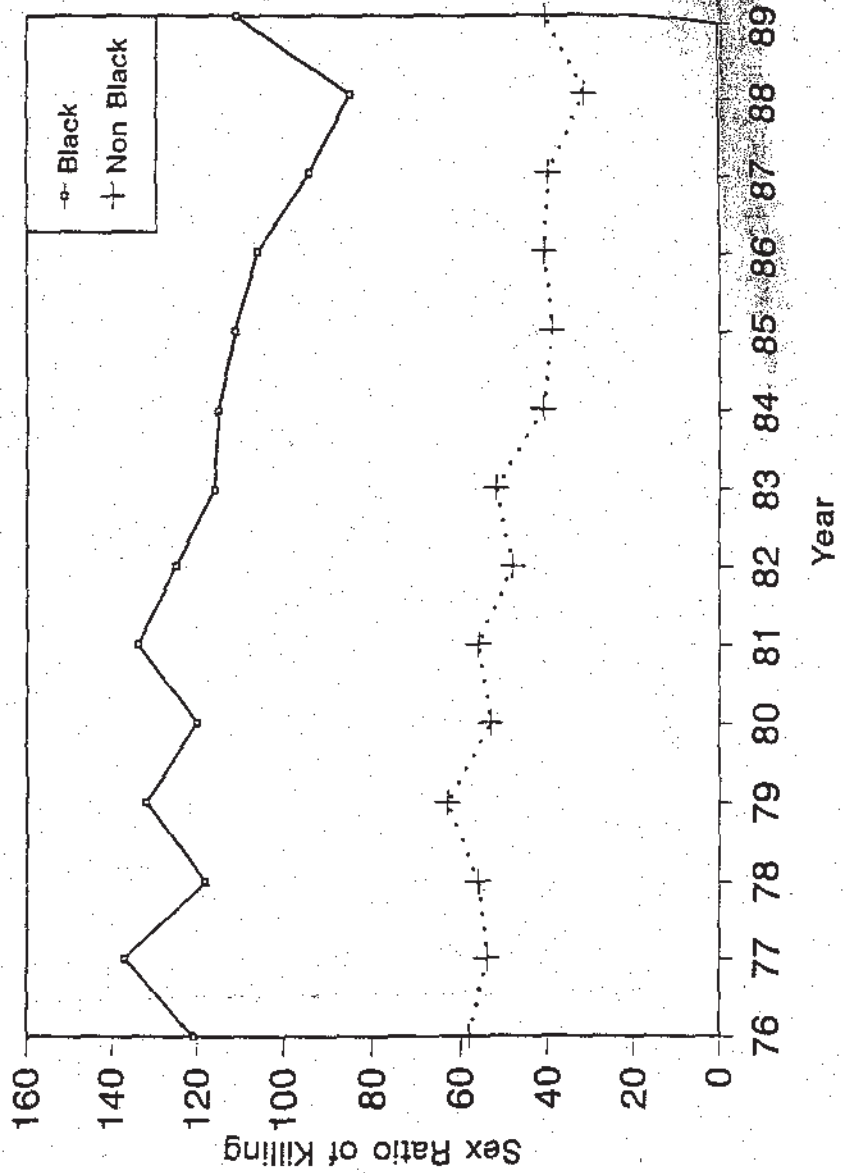
Table 3
 The Yearly Sex Ratio of Killing (SROK^a) for Black and Non Black

Year	Black Killer			Non Black Killer				
	Male	Female	Total	SROK	Male	Female	Total	SROK
1976	436	526	962	121	604	350	954	58
1977	377	518	895	137	645	350	995	54
1978	396	468	864	118	647	361	1008	56
1979	364	479	843	132	648	409	1057	63
1980	373	448	821	120	661	353	1014	53
1981	306	411	717	134	676	377	1053	56
1982	272	340	612	125	645	311	956	48
1983	289	336	625	116	643	335	978	52
1984	232	266	498	115	632	256	888	41
1985	241	267	508	111	714	279	993	39
1986	265	282	547	106	668	275	943	41
1987	236	223	459	94	620	249	869	40
1988	234	198	432	85	632	202	834	32
1989	204	227	431	111	515	210	725	41

^a The SROK is calculated by dividing the number of female homicides by male homicides and then multiplying by 100.

As depicted in Figure 1, there was an overall reduction in the SROK for both groups from 1976-1989.

Figure 1
Black and Non Black Sex Ratio of Killing 1976-1989



Summary and Discussion

One of the most startling aspects of our findings is the discrepancy in the SROK for the various racial groups. It is evident that the SROK varies considerably across races. Overall, the SROK for Black women is more than six and one half times higher than that of Asian women, three and one half times higher than that of Hispanic women, almost two and one half times larger than that of White women, and close to twice as large as the sex ratio of killing for Native American women. The SROK also varies considerably based on the relationship of the victim to the offender. For Blacks, the ratio of killing is 144 for common-law marriages, 99 for ex-spouse relationships and 111 for legally married.[3]

The sex ratio of killing also changed substantially over time. For the fourteen year time period we examined 1977 was the peak year with an SROK of 85, and 1988 the year with the lowest SROK of 46. These differences across time may explain how Wilson and Daly derived their conclusion that generally the SROK in the United States is 75. They used Maxfield's (1989) results for the years 1976-1985 and the ratio for these years is in fact 75. We obtained the same results from our analysis. However, our calculations for 1976-1989 indicate a ratio of 70, and there appears to be a downward trend in the SROK.

We also found that the decline in the SROK differs for Blacks and Non Blacks. For the time period 1976-1988 the SROK for Blacks decreased by 30% from 121 to 85, for Non Blacks there was a 45% decrease in the SROK, from 58 to 32. There was an overall reduction of 29% in the SROK for all racial groups. By 1989, however, we see the SROK for Blacks and Non Blacks begin to rise.

The evidence indicates that the SROK tends to be lower when the overall spousal homicide rate is lower, and this finding holds over time and within the various races. Data for the time period 1982-1988, in particular, demonstrates this trend. The proportion of spouse killers who are women is greater when the total spousal homicide rate is higher.

Research conducted by Mercy and Saltzman (1989) in which they examine trends in homicides between spouses (common-law and legally married) lends support to our finding indicating a decline in the SROK when the overall spousal homicide rate is lower. Although Mercy and Saltzman did not focus on the sex ratio of killing as we do, their research helps to demonstrate the link between spousal homicides and the SROK. Mercy and Saltzman found that spouse homicide declined by more than 45% for Black husbands and wives but was virtually unchanged for White husbands and wives between 1976 and 1985. The spouse homicide rate for Black husbands decreased by 52.0% from 12.7 to 6.1, and the rate for Black wives decreased by 45.8% from 9.6 to 5.2 (p. 597). It is rather perplexing that the decline in spouse homicide was limited to Black couples.

A similar decrease in rates of severe nonfatal wife and husband abuse was also found during the time period 1976-1985. In the replication of the National Family Violence Survey, (Straus & Gelles, 1986, p. 470) serious nonfatal wife and husband

abuse was reported to decline by 21.1 and 4.3 percent respectively. Findings such as this are relevant to the analysis of homicides between spouses since previous research suggests that nonlethal violence is a frequent antecedent of homicide (Browne 1985, Straus 1985). In fact, most family murders are prefaced by a long history of assaults (Hawkins, 1986a).

Several explanations have been offered to account for the decline in homicides between spouses. The decrease may be attributable to the spread of treatment programs and battered women's shelters, the greater acceptability of divorce and changes in the structure of families, such as increases in age at first marriage, or to economic changes which may have decreased levels of stress on families (Mercy & Saltzman, 1989). In their analysis of the relationship between gender-specific rates of partner homicide in the United States, and the availability of legal (domestic violence legislation) and extralegal (shelters for battered women, wife abuse programs) resources, Browne and Williams (1989) found that the availability of these resources for abused women was associated with a decline in the rates of female-perpetrated homicide from 1980-84, as compared to rates in 1976-79. It may be the case that greater accessibility to these resources, coupled with enhanced economic opportunities enabled Black women to terminate abusive and/or volatile relationships. This rationale would account for the decline in homicides committed by Black women and the subsequent reduction of the Black SROK found in our analysis.

In light of the differences in the spousal homicide ratio across various racial groups in the United States, we now can examine Wilson and Daly's hypothesis that the sex ratio of spousal homicide for America as compared to other Western nations is exceptional. While the summary figures for the United States are higher than other nations, various racial groups in the U.S. are similar to other countries in their spousal sex ratio of killing. The SROK of American Asians is lower than almost all European nations mentioned by Wilson and Daly except perhaps Denmark. Denmark however, is a questionable comparison because the sex ratio of killing presented is based on data for the years 1933-1961, an obviously different social and economic time period. The SROK for Hispanics, 33, is comparable to New South Wales and Canada, and lower than Scotland's. The sex ratio of killing for Whites in the United States is considerably higher than the ones for other Western nations, although it is not much higher than Scotland's. Native Americans have an excessive SROK as compared to other Western countries, however only including homicides for those individuals legally married substantially reduces the magnitude of the sex ratio of killing, making it comparable to New South Wales and Canada, and lower than Scotland's SROK. Blacks account primarily for the wide disparity in SROKs between the United States and New South Wales, Canada, England/Wales and Scotland, respectively.

Wilson and Daly asked why the SROK in the United States is so much higher than in other Western nations. However it is more important to determine why Blacks have a higher SROK than other racial groups, since it is their figure which

dirves up the overall sex ratio of killing in the United States. (Excluding blacks from our analysis reduces the total SROK for the U.S. to 48). Is there something about Black family structure which increases or decreases the propensity for a large spousal homicide ratio?

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE LARGE BLACK SPOUSAL HOMICIDE RATIO

Most explanations offered for the large Black spousal homicide ratio focus primarily upon poverty, unemployment and racial inequality (O'Hare, 1985; Pearce, 1983). One plausible justification for the low rate of spousal homicide of Black women as compared to White women has to do with the greater power of Black women (Plass & Straus, 1987). Over 50% of Black households are headed by females, primarily due to Black male joblessness. White women, in contrast are less likely to be head of their household. (Only 20% of white households are headed by women) (Sampson, 1987). Because White women have greater economic, social and emotional dependency on their husbands, they may be more vulnerable to being victims of wife beating and homicide than Black women (Cazenave & Straus, 1990).

According to Stack (1974) and Valentine (1978), Black men are victims of spousal homicide more often than White women because of the economic situations of Blacks in the United States, certain characteristics of the Black family, and the gender role orientations of Black men. Black men, similar to White men are socialized to assume the role as head of their household. However, because of chronic unemployment, Black men lack economic, and subsequent decision making authority in their households. When Black males try to assert their role as head of their families, wives tend to regard their authority as illegitimate. As a result, these Black men will resort to their strength as the basis for exercising power, and the resulting violence could become lethal, in this instance victim-precipitated homicide (Allen & Straus, 1980).

Hare (1979) and Hampton (1980) suggest that racial discrimination has prevented African American males in many cases from fulfilling the traditional male role of head of household and provider. To the extent that Black males internalize mainstream standards for appropriate masculine roles, they are confronted with the conflict between what they are and what they have been led to believe they should be. It is this internal struggle that can lead to marital discord and subsequent spousal homicide.

Although factors such as gender role socialization may provide an explanation for family violence precipitated by Black males, it does not adequately address the high number of spousal homicides committed by black women. One feasible justification for this occurrence is retaliation. Violent behavior by wives directed at their husbands may reflect acts of self defense or retribution. Analyses of homicides between intimates show that they are often preceded by a history of

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physical abuse directed at the women (Bourdouris, 1971; Chimbos, 1978) and several studies have documented that a high proportion of women imprisoned for killing a husband had been physically abused by their spouses (Lindsey, 1978; Schwartz, 1987). In a study comparing battered women who had killed their partners with women who had not killed their partners, Browne (1985) found that the frequency and severity of wife abuse was associated with homicide. Fifty-one percent of the women in Mann's (1991) study claimed self defense as the reason for killing.

Another possible explanation for the large number of Black female-perpetrated spousal homicides, consistent with Plass and Straus' power thesis (1987), is that the superior power position Black women occupy accounts for their high rates of killing. Because Black women as heads of households take on roles traditionally held by white males (ie. breadwinner, decisionmaker), they may also assume some of the characteristics of being a stereotypical male in our society such as behaving aggressively. Black female aggression can translate into family violence and subsequently become deadly. Research by Hampton, Gelles and Harrop (1989) lends support to this theory. Hampton et al. (p. 973) report that in 1985 the overall rate for violence among Black spouses (married and cohabitating) was 247 per 1,000 couples. However, disaggregating this rate by gender revealed a husband abuse rate of 204 per 1,000 couples, whereas the rate of wife abuse was 169 per 1,000 couples. In addition, studies of violence among intimates demonstrates that violence and aggression are often used in marriage and family situations to enforce the will of the more powerful over the weaker (See Viano, 1990).

Wilson and Daly present several factors which may account for the large Black SROK in the United States. They indicate that Black homicide rates "have been related to economic circumstances, history, social structure, and political and legal disenfranchisement" (p. 203). (See Blau & Blau, 1982; Block, 1976; Curry & Spergel, 1988; Hawkins, 1986b; 1990; Lane, 1986; Messner, 1982, 1983; Messner & Tardiff, 1986; Sampson, 1985, 1987). However, they contend that the association between homicide rates and urban under-class membership is not explicit (p. 203). Blacks and Hispanics are both overrepresented in the under-class, yet in the Chicago sample Wilson and Daly found that the Hispanic SROK was not much higher than whites.

Although Blacks and Hispanics are both overrepresented in the under-class, the difference in SROK may lie in the family structure and power relations among Hispanics. The cultural tradition of male superiority and the closed nature of the Hispanic family predicated upon intense loyalty (Farias & Handley, 1990) might account for their lower SROK as compared to Blacks. Hispanic women like White women can be economically and socially dependent on their husbands, consequently they may be more vulnerable to being victims of wife-beating and homicide than Black women. Strong family loyalty may prevent Hispanic women from terminating an abusive relationship, or retaliating when confronted with violence.

CONCLUSION

We have reexamined the spousal sex ratio of killing using the Supplementary Homicide Reports in order to determine if the SROK in the United States is much more different than the SROK in other Western nations. While our results show that the overall SROK for the United States is higher than other nations, they indicate that SROK is an elastic measure, varying by time and race. Some racial groups in the United States such as Asians and Hispanics have SROKs lower than several Western societies Wilson and Daly analyzed.

Since race is a significant predictor of spousal homicide (and homicide generally) in the U.S., we think it would be more appropriate in conducting cross-national comparisons of the sex ratio of killing, to disaggregate the summary figures by race. In the samples Wilson and Daly provide for various other Western nations there is no way to determine which racial/ethnic groups contribute most to the SROK they obtained. However, for the United States they indirectly measured race in the spousal SROK since previous studies demonstrate that Blacks have the highest incidence of domestic violence, (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) homicide, and spousal homicide committed by women (Curtis, 1974; Loya & Mercy, 1985; Silberman, 1978; Wolfgang, 1958). Based on these studies we would expect the sex ratio of killing for Blacks to be higher than other racial groups, and this is confirmed by our analysis.

In general, we contend that the spousal sex ratio of killing in the U.S. is correlated with socioeconomic factors, race and structure of the family. Due to the limitations of our data set, however, further research is necessary to determine which factors contribute the most to this phenomenon in the United States and why. Additional analyses would enable us to ascertain definitive reasons for the large number of spousal homicides committed by Black women. Future research could provide explanations for the low sex ratio of killing among Hispanics, and our rather perplexing finding that Native American women who are not legally bound to their relationships are more likely to be perpetrators of homicide than Native American women who are legally married. In order to address these issues, analysis of spousal homicides must be conducted at the micro level. Individual families must be the focus of subsequent research in this area.

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Notes

- [1]. Out of 23,263 cases, the ethnicity of victim and offender is only reported for 9,624 incidents of spousal homicide. Of these only 844 cases consisted of Hispanics. The low number of Hispanic incidents can be attributed to the fact that data on this ethnic group was not collected prior to 1980 and began to wane by 1986.
- [2]. The White SROKs are 48 and 36 for ex-spouse and girlfriend, respectively, and the Black SROKs, 99 and 99 for ex-spouse and boy/girlfriend, respectively. For those couples legally married, the SROKs are 48 and 111, Whites and Blacks, respectively. (Note: The sex ratio of killing for White ex-spouse and those legally married are identical).
- [3]. We have not performed chi square tests to determine if the differences between groups are statistically significant. This procedure would be inappropriate since our sample clearly is not random. Moreover, with such a large sample size, there is a high probability of obtaining statistically significant results even if the magnitude of the difference is negligible.